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SUBJECT: HARIRI PUTTING FINAL TOUCHES ON CABINET FORMATION

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) The last holdout in the opposition, Change and Reform bloc head Michel Aoun, has assented to Prime Minister-designate Hariri's cabinet formation proposal. Following a meeting of the opposition leaders on November 6, Aoun announced on November 9 that his bloc would be represented by Charbel Nahas (telecoms ministry), Gebran Bassil (energy ministry), Ibrahim Dedeyan (industry ministry), Fady Abboud (tourism ministry), and Youssef Saadeh (minister of state without portfolio).

¶2. (C) "We're almost there," Nader Hariri, advisor to the PM-designate, said to us the afternoon of November 9 as the PM-designate was completing negotiations with the Christians in his March 14 coalition. Former Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad told the Ambassador the same day that the independent MPs of the March 14 coalition were pressing for MP Boutros Harb to represent them in the cabinet. Harb, who had said publicly that he would accept the justice minister position or remain outside the government, is being encouraged to take the labor or information portfolios, caretaker Minister of State Nassib Lahoud told the Ambassador. Kataeb has also prolonged negotiations by demanding the education ministry. Nader Hariri revealed to us that caretaker Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar will return in the same role, and Kataeb will receive the social affairs ministry. Nader said that the PM-designate had received the names of all of the opposition's ministers and the cabinet will "most likely" be formed on the evening of November 9 if Saad Hariri can resolve his allies' demands.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: With Aoun having obtained three Maronite seats and three significant ministries, Hariri's Christian allies are keen to establish their credentials with their base. Nevertheless, they have made clear that they will ease cabinet formation, so no significant delays are expected. After the PM-designate and President Michel Sleiman jointly sign the decree naming the cabinet, the new cabinet has thirty days to submit its ministerial statement to the chamber of deputies for approval. Until that time, they will assume caretaker status.  
SISON